

RollPlay



GM NOTEBOOK
ISSUE THIRTY

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Welcomed Crossings, Patrons!

Obviously the big thing this month was the 100th Episode of Court of Swords. What an accomplishment and you all made it possible. It was something really magical getting to step into that brand new studio space and to look at all the flashy new gear and the place where for years to come (with a little luck and hard work) we'll get to produce a ton of new content. The only reason that space, the live live shows and everything else are possible is because of our patreon. We launched the Patreon and Court of Swords at the same time, give or take, and so in my head they're intimately tied. In this issue of the zine, you can take a peek at all my (ridiculously unused) live live show prep, and all the notes for the episodes leading up to it, as well as a few episodes prep for Far Verona! At the end, I've thrown in some photos I took at the live show, to give you a bit of a view into the backstage.

Thank you so much for your support, and welcome to Issue 30 of the GM's Notebook.

Adam Koebel
RollPlay GM



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Court of Swords:

Episode 98

FAR VERONA:

EPISODE 22



Court of Swords: Episode 98



(4 hours until Yolla Zi wakes up)

8hrs) 1
[RAMUS on Mahariib +
SPELL Gary]

the PCs have arrived at the closest Moon Bridge location to the Monastery, a horrific ruin that was once a jewel in the midland Court of Swords, the sister temple to the Monastery of the Sun.

the moon shrine itself is a ruin, filled with the undead prowling for flesh, from which the PCs must first escape before they find themselves in the jungle, with the temple in the distance, and danger inbetween. (temple under a burst dam)

the green fluid Ramus has is a soul virus in it: it'll kill anyone with a soul but will make someone without one into a receiver - the Necromancer King hopes to use Ramus as a gateway to Heaven...

[Yolla Zi has a vision of death, Ramus afire and Ramus marafied - fire or darkness, old power awakened or the darkness spreads]

Yolla's father has been captured by the King, his Mother desperate for help "Halls of the Dead"

Mahariib's Ring is a Gold Koi Blessing (Ring of Swimming)



For Verona: Ep. 22

"Even a black heart beats"

↑ this is who Gabriel needs, whoever they are.

Trilliant / Church conspiracy?! Who is boss @ Andophael?

Goals:

- Nomi: determine the extent of Penelope's guilt ✓
- Booker: use the party to raise people's opinion of me
- Gabriel: find someone trustworthy to take orders from
- Kiran: ascertain my aunt's involvement in the STO ✓

the Navigator wants to get out with ACRE's help, there's an ACRE gunship on the way (the ACRE Family Planning) who'll try and fuck up the Prudence.

Yancy wants to deal with the ACRE rep on the ship: he suspects that she is a traitor but either way wants Nomi to learn whatever secrets she has and then get rid of her. This is in part a plot to raise his esteem w/ the Richter and also to see how Nomi does as his personal intelligence goon. Always a test with this guy...

Penelope Lau (ACRE) wants to get off the ship safely, with her very valuable data intact. Her personal file server contains information about diplomatic connections between ACRE and House Vela, and an incriminating list of names on both sides. Her priority is her own safety, the safety of that data and then everything else, in that order.

The Richter wants to solidify and confirm the loyalty of the crew, ensuring everyone onboard is either specifically in his pocket or of direct use to him. He isn't sure about Booker, distrusts the Velans, sees Nomi as Yancy's pet, but wants to speak with Gabriel about "the coming trouble" and ensure Gabriel is capable of tending to the needs of the crew in a "time of war".

the Emira's escape route (the "One Take Over the Line") is in-system in ~24 hours

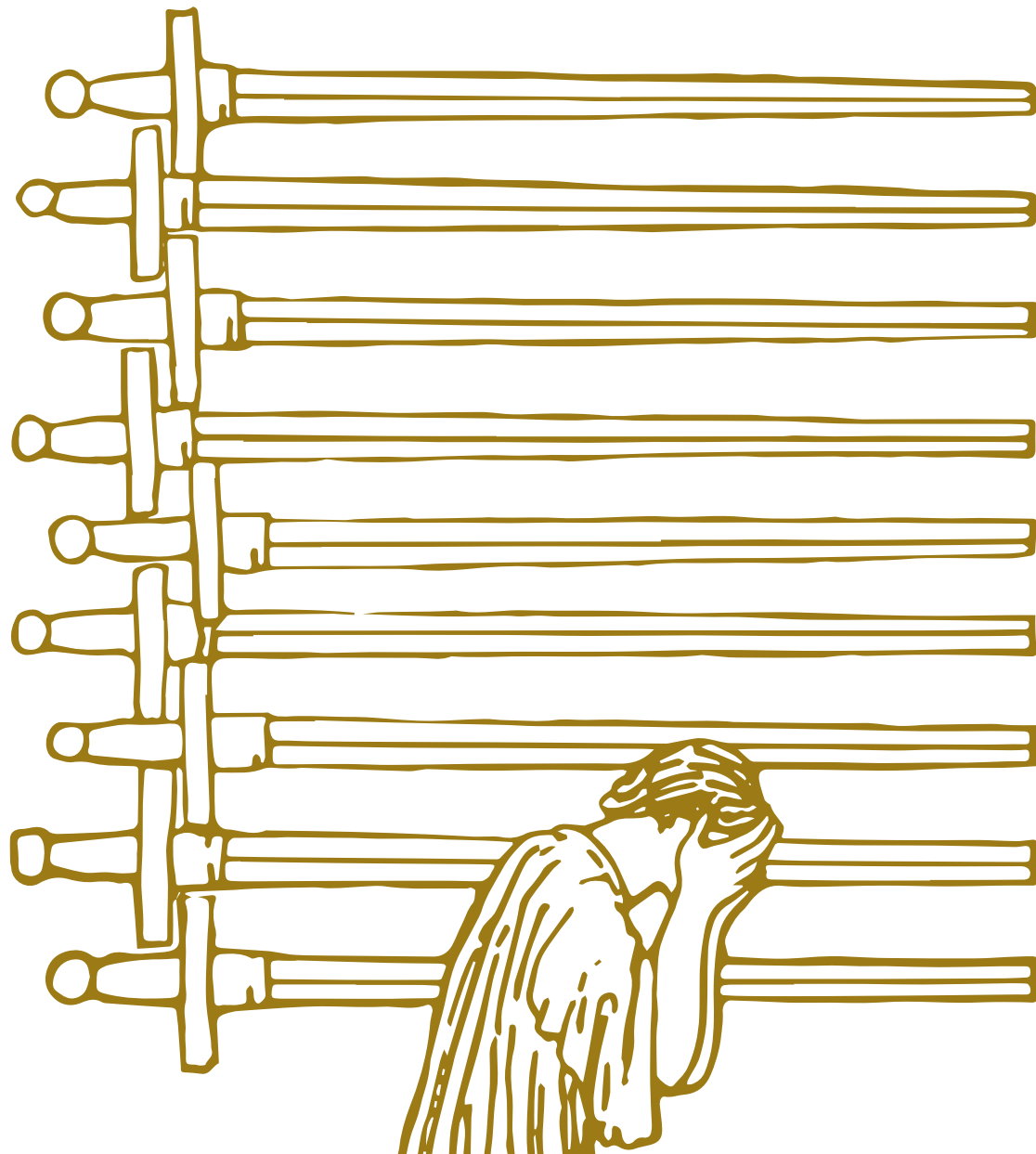
Aram Cruz provides a name: a member of the church who is laundering credits for Trilliant through "charitable donations" and tithes to the Cathedral: Lector Daniel Nguyen

What will Yancy think of Nomi's choice to just let the Emira go?

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Court of Swords:

Episode 99



Court of Swords: Episode 99

(this is the episode where I just yell "nine-nine!" every time JP says what episode we're on.)

The PCs have just escaped the bowels of an undead hollow, a sunken and despoiled former temple to the moon in which a pack of hunting undead hid out from the day's harsh light. The temple itself was once holy and sacred, but has long been abandoned.

In the distance we can see the spires and rooftops of the Monastery of the Sun, the ultimate goal of the characters here in the Court of Swords. This episode will focus on the journey between their arrival point (a one-way trip destination, as there's nobody to open the gate at this end) and the Monastery itself. Between these two points is a flooded vale, a bunch of bullshit jungle, and probably some Zombies.

Travel rules: according to the DMG, under hot conditions, PCs need **1 pound of food** and **2 gallons of water** every day they are traveling. Foraging (DMG pg 111) in this environment is **DC 15** and success results in **1d6 + WIS** pounds of food and then again in gallons of water. [Berg is an outlander.]

For the portion of the trip outside the jungle, no roll is needed to stay on course. Once they enter the shit, it's **DC 15** to stay on course. Getting lost basically just means time + supply waste and the danger that they'll run into something deadly.

The journey ✖️➡️

The Monastery is ~50 miles away, with the PCs able to travel about ten miles every day. With some skill, they can cross the flooded vale in two days, then the jungle in X (where X is 3+ the amount of "totally lost they get").

The flooded vale: encounters ✖️

The temple vale was once the home to a Moon temple and environs (storage, the temple, an oracular tower, a small crematorium, etc.) but was abandoned several years ago, then during a particularly nasty monsoon season, the old Dwarven dam broke, flooding the vale + creating the ruins. Now the vale is mostly forgotten - the good loot is gone and only the dead and a few rare animals visit the place.

during one of their nights in the flooded vale, the PCs encounter some terrible creatures who stop in the vale to water before heading west into the mountains: a family of hungry wyverns...

[put together a map with a day/night option - flooded swampy times: they either get hunted out in the open or ambushed at camp if they find somewhere dry to rest]

The wyvern clutch will flee if the party fights back too hard, they're animals after prey, not bloodthirsty maniacs

The jungle: encounters 🌿

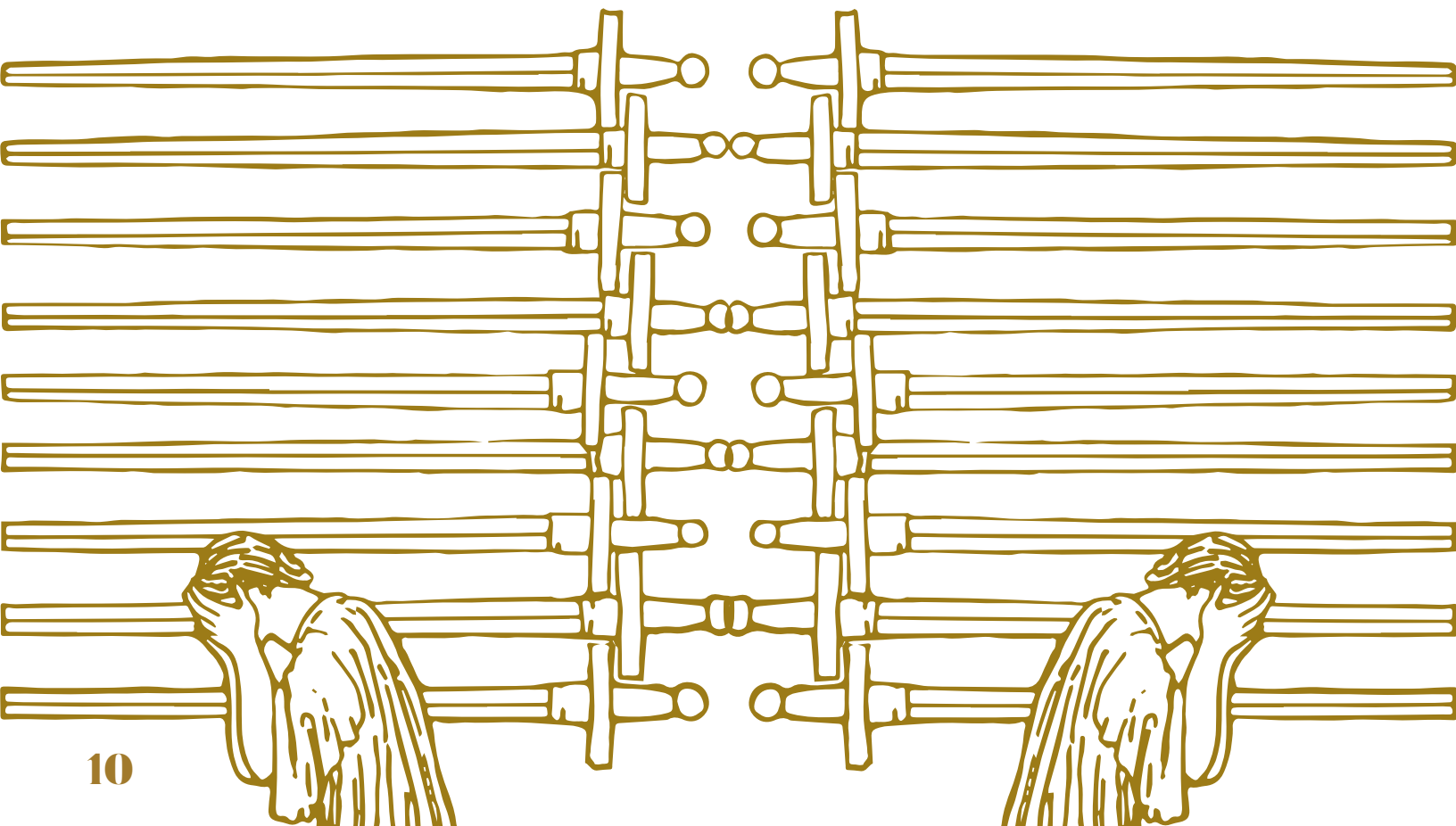
as they get closer to the temple, the PCs will encounter **Zaida al-Shaim**, a Court of Wands researcher + wizard. she is camped out near the monastery, observing it, and could be a useful ally if the PCs want to continue inside. Zaida is hesitant, she's met far too many dangerous people out here to trust anyone readily.

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Court of Swords:

Episode 99

Part II



Court of Swords: Ep. 99 (cont'd)

Zaida:

the researcher is a level eight wizard, a human, and an expert in cross-court religious practices. She herself is a "faithful generalist" and considers human religious practice a deeply curious thing. She's come to the Court of Swords to study "religious adaptation to material and spiritual crises" and has been in the midlands for just over eighteen months. She comes from the Library at Tahl'kat, an ancient fortress-school, and she comes here alone.

what Zaida wants:

- to understand the greater situation in the Court
- to get to know the PCs' religious or spiritual beliefs and if they are motivated by them, here
- to learn the fate of those inside the monastery

REVENGE!

what Zaida knows:

- there is a dangerous group operating in the midlands mountains; the Bloody Scale Revenge Society, who have been attacking travellers, freebooters and the servants of the Necromancer King indiscriminately
- the Monastery of the Sun was the site of a terrible year-long siege: the monks within held out against the Necromancer King's army until his Lieutenant, a Sorceress called Mouthful of Worm-Ridden Grave Dirt, unleashed a plague on the sacred place - now, Grave Dirt rules it and this whole area. Zaida has attempted to get an audience, but to no avail.
- there are rumors of a Primordial Cult lurking in an abandoned dwarven hold nearby, but Zaida hasn't seen them herself (she doesn't really care about this particular rumor - pre-Heaven cults aren't her "thing")
- Grave Dirt is an ambitious and charismatic leader: her servants are both living soldiers and creatures of darkness

(Instinct vs. Destiny...)

"the librarian" : a friend of Ramus

they set off a Revenge trap, and Zaida comes to investigate. (She sends Peanut, her homonculus, and scries)

to think about going in to Episode 100:

(a way for Yalta Zo to show his unique strength: overcoming fear?)
the irony of the goliaths is that they don't realize they're the only giants left.

- keep things punchy - we only have eight hours
- let them get away with not always fighting everything (to keep up the pace)
- remember: only the lich, the ghosts and kel are really important fights
- give everyone a chance to take the spotlight
- do goals twice; once at start and once after the break

[A sort of rebel base type situation: old dwarven town]

Act One: Zaida introduction, temple recon and/or meeting A-Wut (who tells them the temple must be purged (a task to prove themselves))

Ramus' soul has been shuffled on.

Act Two: Meet A-Wut (the Ember camp)

Act Three: The battle and ramifications

Act Four: Confrontation w/ Papa Zel, Grave Dirt talk or fight, denouement, hook for episode 101

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FAR VERONA:

EPISODE 23

Court of Swords:

Episode 101



For Verona: Episode 23 **

- the Emira has left the ship. In 1 hour, the ACRE ship "family planning" will arrive to secret away the ACRE rep and the Navigator. The Navigator has bribed a member of the deck crew to give her shuttle access for a "secret trip to Berkman"
- when we begin, ask Booker and Nomi how much they've said and to whom, then go from there...
- if Yancy, the Captain or the Richter aren't told, the FP arrives + the Navigator bails: the data package scrambles the ship's sensors long enough to make the escape
- if they told them, the scene is on the bridge, weapons locked on the shuttle ready to fire, or they can use the 24 hours to deal with the Navigator directly...

mech: 14/40

- FLIGHT OF THE NAVIGATOR -

Court of Swords: Ep. 101

[60 hours of unconsciousness.] ### ### III

[30 hours of confusion on duty] ### ### III

Ramus is whole again! He drank the Mox potion + got better, sort of.

"All those who seek freedom
from tyrants, despots, foreign powers
from heaven
your new life awaits you
in the Monastery
Come, learn to strangle your
masters with the
chains they used to bind you"

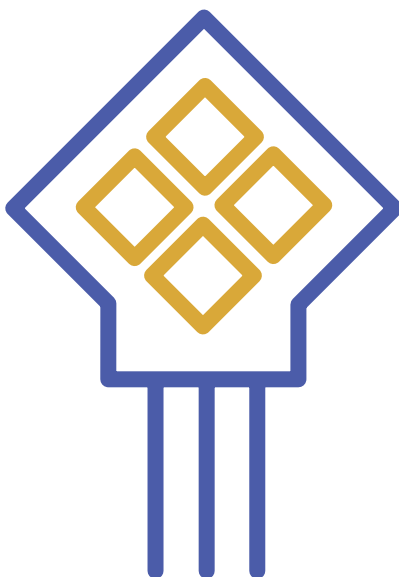
Yolla Zo's past life: a human nun (123 years ago) of a desert tribe

make a name for the two peasant dads



FAR VERONA:

EPISODE 24



Far Verona: Episode 24

- time moves forward; let each PC do a scene during the interim
- news update: House Vela suspected of collusion with anti-Imperial powers, ACRE aggression on Diamikato, growing fringe religions threaten the Core's stability, House Fornax rumored to be providing materiel to pirates, increasing influence of the Trilliant Ring, House Crux to outsource management of Gleipnir.
- the ship has a new navigator: **Seeker Pyxis Durant Lewis** (young, talented, gay, friendly - cautious for now...)
- after PC scenes, Yancy briefs Nomi on the mission: a new oversight commission is being appointed + House Crux wants the candidates vetted. Go to Imperial Prime with Booker and the Chaplain and investigate; he wants a report before the preliminary votes are cast.
- The Captain meets with Nomi + Ricky, tells Nomi there's more to this than Yancy is letting on - she tells Ricky her mission is to protect Nomi - make sure she gets back to the ship in one piece.

Write goals!

nomi :

booker:

bicky:

gabriel:

- one of the candidates is 100% definitely a synth, connected to a network of other synths, operating through the guise of a CHR cell - they have plans to kill the comptroller (to further keep the STO/empire apart)
- the synth cell is interested in getting to know the PCs (they're justifiably nervous around a Crux special operations team) so feel free to interject synth-ness into a failed or 7-9 connect result. I figure the whole cell is maybe 3 synths and 10-15 CHR folks
- show off Imperial Prime during a festival season: beautiful, enormous, high tech, dripping with significance even though the Week of Shadows is a time of mourning, citizens are here to visit the splendor of the great Capital.
- don't hold off too long with the synth stuff: paranoia and "who is the synth" should be a pretty prevalent facet of the arc.

A black and white photograph of four people sitting around a table in a room with framed artwork on the walls. The people are engaged in a discussion or meeting. The room has several framed pictures on the wall, including one of a robot and another of a person in a suit. The overall atmosphere is professional and collaborative.

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Court of Swords:
Episode
100

Thematic Stuff, Elements to Include

The Monastery of the Sun is our central piece, the locus of all this bad history and return to the failures of the past

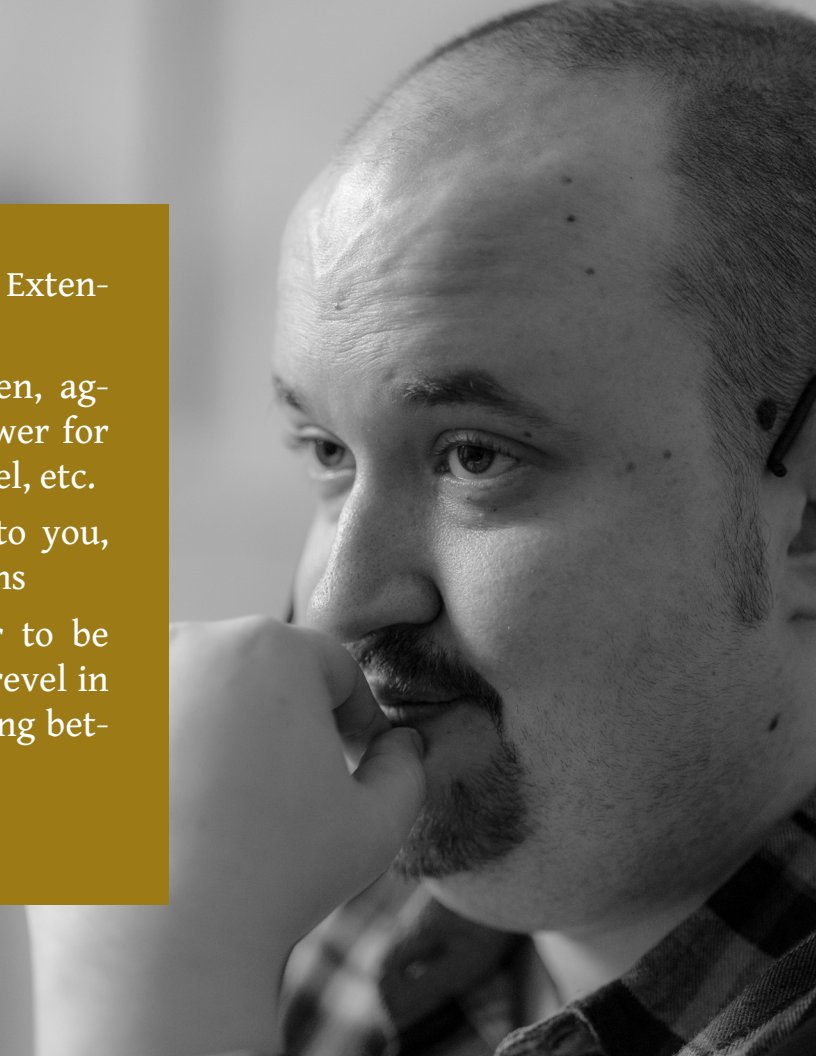
The Embers of Imix, representing both an ancient pact for Maharib and a new beginning for Ramus (swearing new oaths, starting a new cycle, reinvigoration, etc.)

- The Embers have an agenda: fire burns, it destroys, it lays waste but doesn't do much else, really.
- The conflict between Heaven and Primordials is the conflict between Fate and Instinct - what is Instinct if not inborn natural Fate? Are they different? Is a fire FATED to burn or simply a matter of build-in thoughtless action?
- Fire metaphors for Ramus / the past: rekindling the fire vs. letting it go out, all fire burns out in the end, that's part of its story - no flame burns forever, eventually the fuel runs out



The Necromancer King and The Mara by Extension

- Anti-fate, the “fuck you” to Heaven, aggressive self-interest and human power for its own sake, the breaking of the wheel, etc.
- Take control, don’t have it given to you, strangle your masters with your chains
- Petty revenge, things we consider to be “low” behaviour or impulses, do we revel in our shallowness or try to be something better?





The Three Wheeled Cart, the metaphor of a house divided, the falcon cannot hear the falconer, entropy and degradation but fought against by rules and structure - rebuilding, recreating the old

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

Zaida al-Shaim, a researcher and Wizard, Sahir hopeful and obsessive scholar of religion (particularly the Worship of Heaven and its conflict with other faiths - the Primordial Cults, the Mara, etc.) currently studying the Monastery of the Sun

Mouthful of Worm-Ridden Grave Dirt, a sorceress, necromancer (maybe a lich? I dunno.) and the commander of the Monastery of the Sun necropolis. A bad lady to cross.

- Formerly the King of a Court of Swords province, who died when the Necromancer King infected her palace with shadows
- (She knows about the locked gateway to Heaven, which is the REAL reason why the NK took the place.)
- Has a “page” who is an uncorrupted Court of Swords child that she obsesses over and protects, who she calls “Little Sen”
- Served by three bound ghosts, former Magistrates of the Court of Swords, tormented into insanity over a decade of awful sorcery by Grave Dirt

NPC's

NPC's

??? - the mysterious leader of the Bloody Scale Revenge Society. They lead a group of mixed human, dwarven and kobold troublemakers who come down from the mountains to rob, kill and harass anyone not strong or smart enough to defend themselves. Freebooters, NK loyalists, the Court, whoever. They're just here to steal, kill and wreck shit.

Papa Kel, a former (sun soul) monk and benefactor of the Monastery of the Sun, thought dead by his wife and children, but ACTUALLY he's fallen under the sway of the Mara, and is an advisor and ally of Mouthful of Worm-Ridden Grave Dirt.

A-wut, a fire genasi and the leader of the Embers of Imix in the region, a ranger or druid or something like it, a disciple of the flame and a charismatic leader offering the people of the Court of Swords another way. He is wise and clever and ruthless.

NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

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NPC's

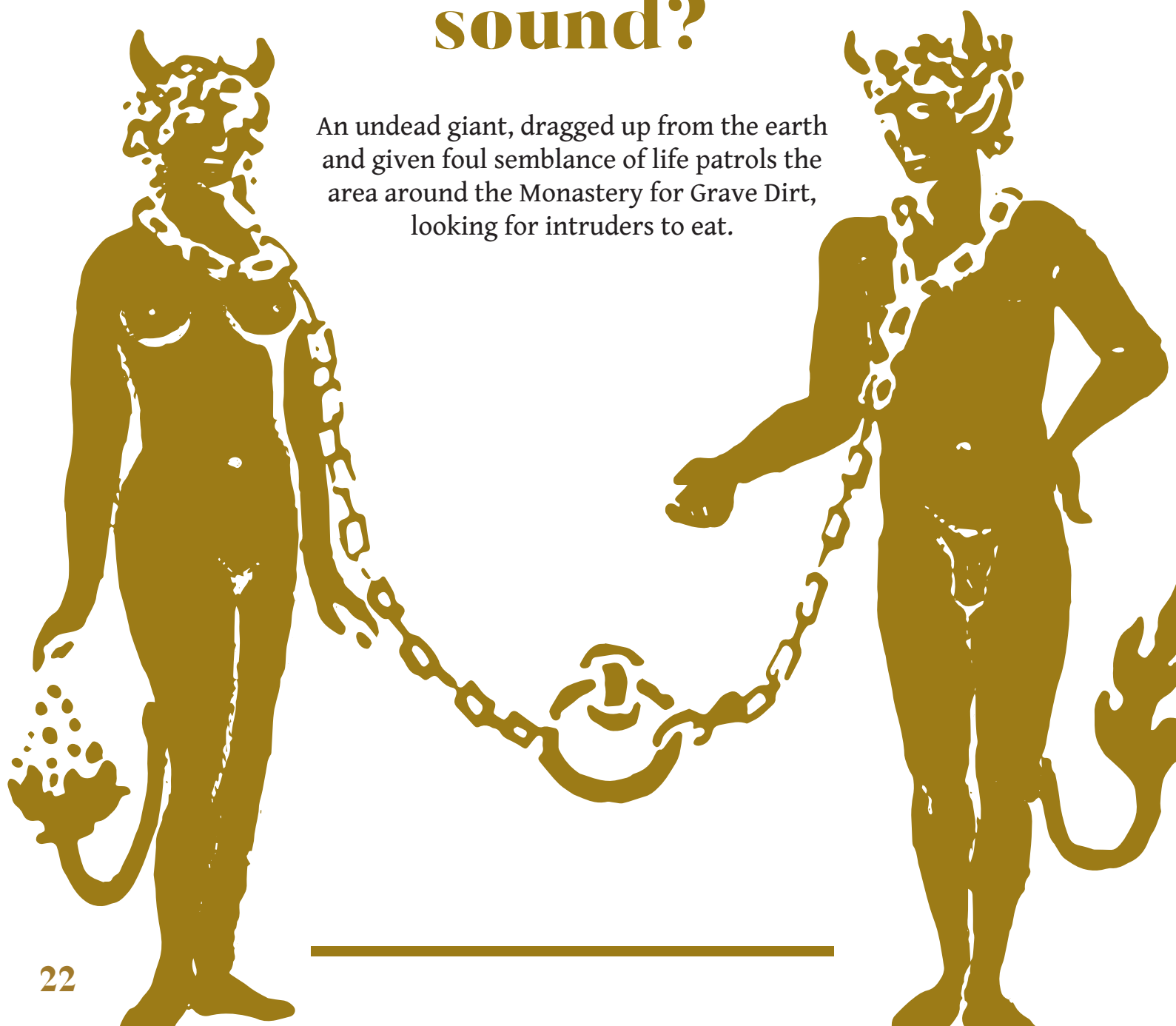
NPC's

NPC's

NPC's

What was that sound?

An undead giant, dragged up from the earth and given foul semblance of life patrols the area around the Monastery for Grave Dirt, looking for intruders to eat.



Encounters:

Outside the Monastery:

- The introduction to Zaida al-Shaim
- *First contact with The Embers*
 - *An audience with A-wut*
- A run-in with the big boi protecting the Monastery
- *An encounter with the Bloody Scales Revenge Society*



Inside the Monastery:

- Interactions with the Guards, some kind of stealth thing where they try to sneak in
 - Getting caught and put into the Re-education camp
 - Getting caught and brought to Grave Dirt
 - Getting caught and brought before Papa Kel
- An interaction with someone in the Camp trying to escape or begging for help
- An interaction with someone in the Camp who has “bought in”
- Any kind of interaction with loyal servants of the Necromancer King (savants, scholars, soldiers, fanatics, regular folk, the rank and file)
- Contrasting and confusing signals: there are devils here but also “good” people fighting for what they believe in - people who see the NK as a hero and those who serve the mara for darker purposes
- Formers slaves of the Officers of the Court of Swords, freed by the Necromancer King (why would we enslave the living when the dead have no need for their bodies)
- First contact with Grave Dirt
 - Interaction with the Chained Magistrates
 - Interaction with Little Sen
- Some kind of undead construction project
- Big Boss Fight in the Inner Sanctum
- An encounter with Papa Kel
 - With Yotta
 - Without
- Big Boss Fight with Papa Kel
- The untouched sun tower / hall of mirrors, etc.
- A run-in with some Revenge Society Thieves

Stat Stuff:

For any random encounter with the undead or with soldiers or whatever, just whip something together with Kobold Fight Club. For specific NPCs or entities, use these stat blocks:

Grave Dirt (Old Dirty Bastard):

Lich

Grave Dirt (Old Dirty Bastard):

A Sun Soul Monk but wherever there's Radiant change it to Necromantic

The Guardian Giant:

Big old undead Storm Giant

Zaida:

Archmage

The Three Bound Magistrates:

Obzedat Ghost (one with spells, one with rage and one with sneak attack / evasion)

Little Sen:

He has 1 hp and dies if you breathe on him too hard



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**Live Live Court of Swords:
Behind the Scenes
Photos**









